

THE BOOK OF BABY BIRDS



By E. J. DETMOLD

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THE BOOK OF BABY BIRDS





THE BOOK OF BABY BIRDS

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THE LONG-TAILED TIT

THE LONG-TAILED TIT

There are few birds so quick as we,
When searching for good fare :
We peck the crevice of a tree,
And dart at insects there.

Sometimes we hear them talk within
The hollows where we sit :
“Beware,” they say, “draw in, draw in!
Outside there is a Tit.”

When small, before our feathers grow,
Our parents bring us food:
Where they obtain it we don't know,
But it is very good.

The Baby Long-tailed Tit is as quaint a little creature as could be seen. Even when full grown he is the smallest English bird except one, the Gold-crested Wren. He has a short hooked beak which, with his loose grey down, gives his face a curious look, something like that of an old man. Many funny names have been given to him, such as “Mum Ruffin,” the “Bottle Tit,” “Bottle Tom,” “Poke Pudding,” and a score of others.

The nest of this tiny bird is quite wonderful.

THE LONG-TAILED TIT

It is a hollow ball nearly oval in shape, with one hole through which the tail of the parent bird may often be seen poking. Both Mr. and Mrs. Long-tailed Tit join in building the nest, and this takes from two to three weeks. They knead it with their breasts and shoulders, and fasten it in the fork of a tree, a hollow in some tree-stem, or in the middle of a thick bush. The walls are of moss and lichen, held by spiders' webs, and the clever little creatures use wool also, and cocoons of spiders' eggs, and the chrysalides of moths, and weave these together with threads of fine wool. The inside of this nest is as soft and cosy a bed as one could imagine, being plentifully lined with tiny feathers. In one nest these were counted, and found to be over two thousand in number.

The eggs of this bird are not any larger than a pea. They are pure white, or pearly grey in colour, sometimes faintly spotted with red. In one nest from ten to twelve eggs are found, and sometimes even as many as eighteen. But when there is such a number it is supposed that two mothers have used the same nest.

Tiny though he be, the Long-tailed Tit has a

THE LONG-TAILED TIT

heart full of courage, and will boldly attack any bird that comes near his young.

Both the father and the mother bird sit on the eggs until they are hatched, which generally happens in the early part of April. Then these good parents have a busy time indeed, catching the insects with which they feed their brood. About the end of June the young Tit becomes fledged, but not until November does he get the rose-red and black and white plumage of the full-grown bird, and the long black tail, edged with white, through which he gets his name.

There could be no more friendly family than this. The father, mother and young ones live together through the summer, autumn and winter in perfect happiness. They do not quarrel, and often the nestlings may be seen, when they first leave the nest, all huddled together on the same branch of a tree.

When April comes again, and the woods are merry with singing, the young Long-tailed Tits bid good-bye to their parents, and fly away to build more dainty nests, and bring up families of their own.

THE LONG-TAILED TIT

Sad to say, all the Tits are not so friendly as those we call "Long-tailed." The largest kind of Tit has a shocking habit of driving his beak deep into the heads of other birds.

Once a thievish cat was seen to pull a Tit's nest from a crevice and devour half the brood. When the brave little mother returned, and saw what had happened, she did not lose heart, but repaired the nest as well as she could, and safely reared what was left of her family.

THE LONG-EARED OWL



THE LONG-EARED OWL

My mother is exceeding wise ;
If you could watch her blink her eyes
The sight would fill you with surprise.

My father has much wisdom too :
All the bright days his words are few,
But at the dusk he cries, " Whoo—Whoo ! "

Oh, you should see his large grave face—
Quite like a judge's (of the race
Called human) listening to a case.

At least they tell me so ; though I,
Of course, can not say clearly why
As yet, scarce knowing how to fly.

When I have long soft wings they say,
And am a full-grown bird of prey,
Then I, too, shall be wise as they ;

And flit to barns and towers at night,
And keep small birds and mice in sight,
And catch them by the moon's cold light.

WHOO ! WHOO !

What is that strange cry that echoes as the night begins to fall? It must be Mrs. Owl, seeking food for her young. Perhaps if you watch closely you may see her swooping along the sides of a hedgerow,

THE LONG-EARED OWL

or by the border of a pine or larch forest. How quiet she is in her flight, but how keen! If a little mouse does but show himself, there is a sudden swoop, then a short sharp squeak, and one tiny nibbler's life is ended.

Searching through a well-wooded spot where there are plenty of pine-trees, you may come upon five or six young Owls sitting side by side together, on a single branch, waiting to be fed.

Among English Owls the most beautiful is the Long-eared or Horned Owl. When quite a baby he is covered with white down which becomes yellowish as he grows older. Then brown begins to show itself among the yellow, and on the wings and tail dark bars which grow broader and darker as Mr. Owl gains his full size.

He takes his name from the longish tufts of feathers on his head. These look like horns or ears, and are made up of eight or ten black feathers edged with yellow and white. His legs are covered with light brown or buff feathers, and he has long curved claws.

Should you go near young Master Owl he will gaze wonderingly at you, with large staring eyes of

THE LONG-EARED OWL

a rich orange colour. Then he will slowly wink, first with one eye and then with the other. Nothing could be more comical than this see-saw blinking. But if he is angry his eyes will flash fire, and if you try to touch him he will fling himself upon his back and prepare to defend himself with claws and beak, all the while making a loud hissing noise.

If you fix your eyes on him in turn and walk slowly round him, first to the right and then to the left, in a half circle, he will follow you with his eyes, without moving his head. Because of this, an absurd story is told that if you walk all round an Owl his head will drop off.

Poor Mr. Owl! He is badly treated, although he is so harmless. He destroys more rats and mice than fifty traps, and yet gamekeepers are his sworn foes, and shoot him without mercy, although he rarely touches young game. Smaller birds, too, will mob him during the day; a shocking indignity for such a wise-looking creature.

Although the young Long-eared Owl looks so important, yet he has to put up with the cast-off nest of some other bird, or the deserted drey of a squirrel, for his mother never builds a nest of her own.

THE LONG-EARED OWL

The eggs of the Owl are quite round, and pure white in colour. They differ from those of the Pigeon in being dull, chalky, and rough to the touch. There are rarely more than six eggs in a nest, and generally only four. The eggs take about twenty-four days to hatch, and may be found during the latter part of March and the beginning of April.

The Owlets remain in the nest for a long while, and they are fed by their mother for ten weeks or more.

A young Owl, when tamed, makes an interesting pet. A poor mother-bird, who had lived for some years in a hollow tree, had her Owlets taken away as soon as they were able to fly. At last she saw a boy climbing the tree to steal the only one she had left. Seizing her Owlet in her claws she quickly carried it off to a place of safety, and never again did she return to her old haunt.

THE MAGPIE



THE MAGPIE

We are named Magpies ; bird-folk that are
By some considered singular ;
But in our homes we do not call
Our family singular at all.

True ; one peculiarity I'll mention
That may be worthy your attention :
Sometimes we use men's words, although
What the words mean we do not know !

This is because, when we are tamed,
We often hear such words exclaimed,
And pick them up, for in that state
We dearly love to imitate.

A charge mankind against us brings
Is that we like to steal bright things ;
But we do not know what is stealing ;
Is it admiring and concealing ?

On second thoughts, perhaps you'll let
Us say no more, being young as yet ;
In truth we may be birds that are
At times a little singular.

WHEN Baby Magpie first peeps out of the shell he finds himself in one of the most cleverly-built nests that a young bird could have.

Whatever her faults may be, and even her best friend must own that she has many, Mrs. Magpie is

THE MAGPIE

a skilful builder, as well as a most devoted mother. For her castle of woven twigs and clay she chooses a safe spot, either in a hedgerow or deep in a wood, or even in the heart of a thick thornbush. First she places twigs, then she plasters these together with clay or mud, then more twigs, then more clay, and she lines the nest with fine soft roots. Over the nest, to protect the eggs and nestlings from birds of prey, she makes a strong, thorny roof, leaving on one side a hole, just large enough for her to slip in and out. It must be her own thievish habits that have taught her this safe way of building, for she knows how easy it is for eggs and young birds to be snatched from an open nest.

Her eggs are generally six or seven in number, and their colour is a pale bluish-green, very thickly spotted and freckled with olive brown and ash grey.

The Magpie, as a rule, builds a new nest every year, but sometimes she patches up her old one, and makes that do. The deserted nests are eagerly pounced upon by such birds as Hawks and Long-eared Owls, who are too lazy to build their own.

During the first few weeks of his life the young Magpie is of a greyish colour, but soon he puts on

THE MAGPIE

the handsome tints of his parents. His head, neck, throat and back become a velvety-black, his under-plumage white, and his wings and tail have beautiful blue and green and bronze reflections.

There is no more hungry creature than the young Magpie, and his Mother is kept hard at work supplying his needs. Sad to say, these birds are not content with worms, snails, slugs and other insect pests, but they do not scruple to raid the other birds' nests, eat their eggs and carry off their young.

The Magpie pairs for life, but, should Mrs. Magpie be killed, her mate soon finds another partner.

Shining things that could not be of the least possible use to him have a great attraction for Mr. Magpie. He will steal these whenever he has the chance, and because of this habit he makes a rather tiresome, though amusing, pet.

One interesting bird named Maggie lived at ease for some years in a kind bird-lover's house. She was much favoured and indulged, although the quantity of small articles that she stole was enormous. She learned to say many words, and would come quickly if she were called. Every morning she

THE MAGPIE

used to ride into a town about a mile distant, on a butcher's cart, and return home shortly on a baker's. Her end, like that of so many bird pets, was a sad one. She was rummaging in a wood stack, when a heavy log fell on her beautiful black and white body and killed her.

Another tame Magpie was noticed one day to be hopping about in a state of great delight. She was carrying stones in her beak and dropping them into a deep wooden socket which had been made to hold a clothes post.

Curious to know the meaning of this trick, the bird's owner went to look more closely, and found that an unfortunate toad had fallen into the socket.

Every time the wicked Magpie dropped a stone the poor toad hopped with pain, at which the unfeeling bird gave a loud "currack" of delight.

The young Magpies when they leave the nest still remain with the parent bird, and they will return, year after year, to the same clump of trees in which they first saw the light.

THE WHITETHROAT



THE WHITETHROAT

If you should hear, in a stunted tree,
An outcry made by you know not whom,
Like someone scolding huskily,
That's one of us, you may assume.

Perhaps it is my mother dear—
(Not scolding, I need hardly say)—
But wild with fright to see you near
The nest she has tended many a day!

WHEN the month of May comes and the fields are golden with buttercups, and every pear-tree is white with blossom, then one may see the White-throat searching for a site for her nest.

This bird is a summer visitor, and arrives towards the end of April. When the warm days are over he departs once more.

The nest of the Whitethroat is slight and frail, loosely woven of fine grass stems and tiny roots, and lined sometimes with a little wool. It is mostly so thin that one can see through it, and the outside is often powdered with cobwebs and cocoons.

To find it one must look in some thick piece of

THE WHITETHROAT

tangle, some small bush, or at the bottom of some dense hedge, among briars and brambles. It may be found hanging daintily among the stems of tall weeds, and sometimes even on the ground.

No birds are more anxious to guard their treasures than the Whitethroats. Often they may be seen sitting on some spray with their tails in the air and the feathers of their head and throat erected, scolding with all their might, begging the intruder to go away. Poor little creatures ! How terrified they must be at the thought that some cruel hand may tear down the dainty nest that they have built so carefully, and steal or destroy the four or five eggs within. These eggs may be known by their greenish-white ground colour, and their spots and speckles of grey.

The Whitethroat rears one brood in the year, but if her nest is stolen she will build another and lay more eggs. She has been known to build three nests and lay three clutches of eggs before she was allowed to rear her nestlings in safety.

One mother bird, seeing a stranger near, flung herself down the side of a bank, then struggled and shuffled along as if she were injured, trying in this way to draw attention from her nest.

THE WHITETHROAT

A naturalist tells how he found a Whitethroat's nest in a clump of blackthorn, overgrown with "traveller's joy." All the time that he was looking at it the parent birds were in a dreadful state of excitement. Then he found another nest, close by, just ready for the eggs, but when the parent birds saw him looking they deserted it and built another, about four yards further on, in the same hedge.

When the Mother Whitethroat is sitting she will almost allow herself to be touched before she leaves. She seems to think that the nest is more difficult to find when she is on it. As a rule she leaves the nest twice a day, for about an hour at mid-day, and then again for a shorter time at sunset. While she is away her mate sits on the nest. It is very beautiful to watch how tenderly the father feeds his wife with choice morsels of food, and how sweetly she returns this loving care by flutterings, and other marks of pleasure.

The newly-hatched Whitethroats are queer, helpless mites, quite pink and naked, with the oddest tuft of down on each wee bald head. They seem always hungry, and open wide their yellow mouths, gaping for food. Their heads sway about in a heavy

THE WHITETHROAT

manner, as if the weak little necks could hardly support them. All day the mother feeds them, bringing a mouthful of insects at a time.

Soon they are covered with soft down, and look very sweet and innocent. When they are fledged they have the same reddish-brown colouring as their parents, and the same greyish-white breast. The older birds have silvery-white chin and throat, and the father has a rose-coloured tinge on his breast.

The Whitethroat eats such insects as caterpillars and small beetles, but sometimes the mother leads her young into a garden where they enjoy a feast of raspberries and currants. They are often to be seen hanging upon nettles for the sake of the tiny caterpillars found there, and because of this they are often known as "Nettle-creepers." Altogether they are useful birds, and it would be a selfish man who would grudge them the small handful of fruit they take as just wages for destroying many harmful insects.

THE CHAFFINCH



THE CHAFFINCH

Although some foolish folk may think
We only cry out "Pink! Pink! Pink!"
We know a really pretty song,
Or some of us, to whom belong
A skill in notes denied to others—
Even those so closely kin as brothers.

The story that a Chaffinch feeds
On many useful garden seeds,
Which people constantly repeat,
As if we had nothing else to eat,
Would end if you could kindly mention
Some useless seeds worth our attention.

ON a day in April or May, while walking down some green lane, by the side of a thick hedge, you may have noticed a pair of birds, a cock and a hen Chaffinch, much disturbed by your approach.

"Pink! Pink!" they are crying, as they hop among the twigs in a flurried manner. This is how they behave if any stranger draws near their nest while it is being built, or afterwards when it contains four or five pale-bluish eggs, beautifully spotted with purplish brown.

Very often, indeed, their excited behaviour will

THE CHAFFINCH

draw attention to the nest, which otherwise might never have been noticed.

The Chaffinch builds in gardens, hedges, orchards and copses, but very rarely in the depth of a thick wood. Her favourite tree seems to be a tall hawthorn, particularly one that grows amid a hedge. An apple, pear, or cherry tree is often chosen also.

It is not an easy matter to find the nest, so cleverly is it placed in the fork of a bough, and so beautifully is it covered with lichens. Often it looks exactly like a part of the tree. Mrs. Chaffinch builds the nest while her mate brings the material.

She generally uses a great deal of wool, which she mats together to form a kind of felt. Into this are woven mosses, lichens, thistle-down, spiders' webs and cow-hair.

The Chaffinch collects hairs in fields by picking them one by one from trees and posts where cows have rubbed. Sometimes he is very lucky and finds a large tuft. This is pulled to pieces and the industrious wife weaves the hairs one by one into the nest.

Sometimes rather queer materials are used. One nest was found that had the outside plastered with scraps of newspaper, and in the building of

THE CHAFFINCH

another several postage stamps had been used. The nest is cup-shaped and very elastic. Now and then a Chaffinch builds in a slovenly manner, and it has been noticed that near towns the nests of Chaffinches are apt to be untidy and dingy.

About a fortnight is spent in building, generally the third and fourth week in April.

While sitting the mother is very courageous. One poor bird had all her tail feathers pulled out by a mischievous boy who tried to drag her off the nest, but even then she managed to rear her brood safely.

Another Mother Chaffinch was found frozen to death while protecting her eggs.

A pair of Chaffinches were noticed to be building in a garden quite close to the window of a living room. They seemed not to mind the curious eyes of onlookers, and there they brought up their young in a most unconcerned manner.

Two broods are generally hatched in a year, and the father helps to hatch the eggs. He generally sits at night, and Mrs. Chaffinch during the day.

The fledglings are droll-looking little creatures, and may be seen after they leave the nest, sitting four or five perched on a branch, waiting for their mother.

THE CHAFFINCH

While young they live on grubs, caterpillars, and other insect food, but when grown up it is to be feared that they do some harm to the spring flowers, and it is well known that they help themselves to unsprouted seeds that have been planted in the ground.

When mere youngsters, Master and Miss Chaffinch are exactly alike, but after the first autumn moult the male is the much more brightly coloured of the two. His head and the nape of his neck are bluish, his back a chestnut-brown, shaded to a beautiful green about the tail, his underparts are red, and he has a striking band of white across his wings. The female has this white band also, but she wears a more sober dress, and her breast has no red.

It was once noticed that a Missel Thrush and a Chaffinch had each built a nest in the same tree. The former had young birds while the latter had only eggs. When the Thrush brought food for her brood the Chaffinch left her nest, went up to her neighbour and seemed to beg to be allowed to feed the young Thrushes. After a few moments the Thrush allowed the Chaffinch to take the food and give it to the nestlings.

THE WILLOW WARBLER



THE WILLOW WARBLER

In the feathery family
Of noted singers, none
That flies beneath the sun
Can sing so well as we.

Song is our gift by birth,
We sing because we love it,
There is no art above it
Of all the arts on earth.

Unlike some folk who sing,
We have no need of notes,
But from our little throats
Compose while carolling.

WHEN winter's storms are over, the first true spring song is sung by a bird that is called the Willow Warbler. His pleasant voice is to be heard towards the end of March and the beginning of April.

He is a wonderful singer, this little bird, in his simple coat of olive-green, tinged with yellow. His song begins on a high clear note, and descends in a wonderful ripple of sound.

It is hard to believe that such a frail bird has travelled thousands of miles over continents and oceans. But that, indeed, is what he does. He

THE WILLOW WARBLER

leaves this country towards the middle of September, and goes to Africa and other sunny countries, but each spring he is back in his old haunts, while his wife, Mrs. Willow Warbler, arrives some days after. She is an industrious bird, and soon starts building her nest, which is made of fine straws, dead grass and rootlets, and lined with horse-hair and feathers. It is beautifully covered with a grassy roof, and has a hole in the side for a doorway. Mr. Willow Warbler takes little or no part in the building.

The nest is generally to be found hidden in the grass, but now and then one is discovered in a thick bush ; and once Mrs. Willow Warbler was found to have taken up a lodging in a Robin's nest, built in a hole in a brick wall. She had carefully relined the nest with feathers, and added a domed roof. The Robins had already reared their brood during wintry March weather, when the hole had been many times blocked up with snow.

In a "clutch" or "sitting," are from four to seven eggs, of a pinkish-white colour, with specks of pale rusty-red. While Mrs. Warbler is sitting on these, her husband brings her food most attentively, for she will leave the nest only in the early morning,

THE WILLOW WARBLER

soon after daybreak. During her absence Mr. Willow Warbler takes his turn on the nest.

The eggs are hatched about the first week in June, and when this happens the mother is very excited and happy. As she sits on the nest she may be heard singing to herself in a low, sweet, purring way.

The father helps to feed the young, but he is not so industrious as the mother. At first they are fed about once every ten or twelve minutes, the mother keeping the little bodies warm between the feedings ; but as they grow older and are covered with soft grey down, and then with wee feathers, they have more and more food, with shorter intervals of waiting, until, after fifteen days, when they are fledged and ready to leave the nest, their parents are feeding them all the while.

The young Willow Warblers are not able to fly well at first, but their mother flutters with loving chirps from bough to bough, encouraging them to follow. They have to keep close to the ground, and this is an anxious time, for there are many enemies ready to pounce upon the downy mites. When they are able to fly higher they may be seen sitting in a row on a bough, close together for warmth and comfort.

THE WILLOW WARBLER

A curious story is told of a Willow Warbler who was seen to be industriously helping to feed the hungry brood of a Redstart. Sad to say the real mother was not pleased at this attention, and many times she darted angrily at the Warbler, trying to drive him away. He would not be stopped, however, but waited, and slipped up and fed the babies when the mother's back was turned. As soon as she returned and saw what was happening she would pounce angrily on the intruder, as much as to say she would have no stranger in her nursery.

The next day it was seen that the young Redstarts had left the nest, and the Willow Warbler was trying to follow, and take his part in teaching them how to fly. But their mother succeeded in taking them quite away, and the Warbler was left desolate.

A few days later the same bird was noticed feeding a grey fledgling of some much larger kind of bird, and this big baby was hopping after him, joyfully accepting all that was given.

Perhaps the poor Willow Warbler had lost his own mate and his young, or perhaps, indeed, he was just a busybody, who thought that he alone knew the proper way to feed fledglings.

THE CYGNET



THE CYGNET

Cygnets are we ; and we maintain
That, of all birds who might be vain,
But few could so
Correctly show
That weakness, as our parents twain.

We younger ones are merely grey,
But of a dazzling white are they.
And when they glide,
And let us ride
Upon them, it is glorious play.

How strange it seems that such a graceful creature as the Swan could have such a plain, odd-looking child as the Cygnet ! One could imagine him asking why he has to be content with a dull coat of sooty grey and a leaden coloured beak, while his mother has plumage of dazzling white with a beautiful orange bill ? Her reply, very likely, would be something like this :—

“Have patience, my dear child. Only wait, and then, when two summers are past, you will have done with that sober suit of clothes, and when you are fully two years old you will be as white as I am.”

In the bird kingdom there is no fairer sight to be

THE CYGNET

seen than the Swan, with her long, gracefully curved neck and snowy plumage, gliding majestically over some lake or pond. At times she carries her young on her back, which is flat and well suited for this purpose. When she raises her wings the Cygnets have the most safe and beautiful cradle that could be imagined.

The favourite home of the Swan is some large sheet of water with islands, surrounded by reeds, where she can rear her young in safety. The nest she builds is very large, being about four feet across and two feet high. It is made of old reeds, the dead leaves of the iris, and long grass. The Swan repairs her nest each year, instead of building a new one. In this nest she lays from four to nine eggs greenish-white in colour, and rather rough to the touch. She sits on these from thirty-four to thirty-eight days before they are hatched. During this time the father guards the nest and will hiss angrily at all intruders, and drive away any unfortunate duck or coot who ventures near. When the Mother Swan leaves the nest to find food the father takes her place.

The young Cygnets, when they are hatched, are most jealously guarded. It was seen once that on a small lake near a house a pair of Swans had

THE CYGNET

hatched four Cygnets, and on the same lake a Wild Duck had a brood also. The Father Swan seemed very angry and jealous whenever the young Ducklings came anywhere near his nest, and he would chase them away with angry hissing noises. At the end of a week he had killed every one of the Wild Ducklings, by seizing them in his beak and shaking them, or by holding them under water till they were choked.

With their strong wings Swans have been known to break the arm of a man who has ventured too near, and they will readily attack children during the nesting time.

A few years ago a little boy was playing on the banks of the Thames when he was suddenly attacked by a parent bird who had her nest close by. After buffeting the poor child with her powerful wings she drew him under water, and held him there until he was drowned.

It used to be said that once, and only once, during her lifetime the Swan could be heard to sing a most beautiful song, and this was when she was dying. As a matter of fact the Swan cannot sing at all, and because of this she has been named the Mute Swan. She has, however, two pleasant notes that she utters when she is looking after her young.

THE CYGNET

The Swan has a wonderful instinct for placing her nest above high-water mark, so that floods cannot wash it away or addle the eggs. Once a tame and very favourite Swan, who was sitting on four or five eggs, was noticed to be busy collecting weeds and grasses to raise her nest. Thinking that the bird had some good reason for doing this, her owner ordered a farming man to take down to her a load of haulm, of which the Swan made use, raising her nest quite two and a half feet higher than it had been before.

That very night there was a tremendous fall of rain which flooded many out-houses, and did great damage. The Swan's nest, however, was above, but only just above, the water, and her eggs remained unharmed.

When the Cygnets are a year old their parents drive them away, and they have to start life on their own account. Their food consists of the roots and leaves of water plants, and insects and their larvæ. Perhaps their worst habit, in the eyes of man, is a tremendous appetite for the spawn of fish, which they devour by the quart.

The Swan has been known to live to the age of fifty years.

THE OYSTER-CATCHER



THE OYSTER-CATCHER

To class us as "Oyster-catching" birds
Reveals a practice that proclaims
How carelessly the folk of words
Give plumed and pennoned folk their names.

It's true we go hunting beside the sea,
And like some shell-fish fairly well ;
But none of my kindred known to me
Has ever pecked at an oyster-shell.

And even if one of us were to state
That such a peck he could recall,
It would not be quite accurate
To found thereon a name for all.

THIS bird is one that must love the salt sea-spray, and the strong winds that blow inland, for he may often be seen with his companions, flying low over the water on stormy days, or sitting on a bleak rock, facing the wind, waiting for the tide to fall, when he will be able to search for food in the wet, uncovered sand.

The Oyster-Catcher is one of the handsomest birds to be found on our sea-coasts. His plumage is velvety-black and pure white, his beak bright

THE OYSTER-CATCHER

orange, and his feet and legs purplish-pink. Because of this likeness in colour to the Magpie, he is sometimes called the "Sea-pie."

When this bird is to be seen on the sea-shore, uttering a loud whistle, and then running on in a scared and flurried manner, one may safely guess that there are young ones hiding close by. These are pretty little creatures, beautifully mottled over with greyish-brown down. They are so fond of squatting flat among the stones that one might easily tread on them before seeing that they were there. They have a habit, too, of hiding their heads in the sand, like the Ostrich, and imagining that they cannot be seen.

The mother is so afraid of harm coming to her babies that if she sees a stranger drawing near, she will make swift dashes at him, as if she would like to strike him, but dare not.

The young Oyster-Catcher runs soon after he is hatched. His nest may seem to him a most delightful place, but it really does not look as if it were comfortable. It is simply a hollow on the ground, among the shingles by the sea-shore, generally lined with broken shells and tiny white stones. The mother will often make several nests

THE OYSTER-CATCHER

before she has one to her liking. Sometimes the eggs are just laid on the bare ground, and they are nearly always three in number, stone-coloured, and blotted and streaked with dark-brown. The mother arranges them carefully with their small ends inward. Knowing this, a bird-lover, who had no wish to steal the eggs, found a clutch and arranged them differently while Mrs. Oyster-Catcher was away from home. When she returned she at once replaced the eggs in the proper position. This trick was repeated three times, and always the mother would have her eggs as she wished them. Being an industrious bird, she brings up two families in one year.

While she has young ones the mother gives a shrill piercing cry, which sounds like "Whip! whip! whip!"

The food of the Oyster-Catcher is not oysters, though one might suppose so from the name. He lives on small shell-fish, and worms that he finds on the wet sand. He has a particularly powerful wedge-shaped bill, with which he can strike limpets from rocks. He even opens mussels, putting his bill between the two shells. Sometimes he will wade in shallow water and catch small fish.

THE OYSTER-CATCHER

Although shy in his wild state, the Oyster-Catcher is soon tamed when kept in captivity. A number of these birds have been known to live, in quite a friendly manner, with poultry in a poultry-yard.

Perhaps the strangest tale that has been told about the Oyster-Catcher is this. A kind man, while walking on the sea-shore, found one of these birds with a broken leg and injured wing. He took it home and carefully tended the poor creature.

In the same house there happened to be a cat who had lost her eye, and, in addition to this misfortune, had just had her kittens taken away and drowned. She became quite fond of the Oyster-Catcher, and would lick his plumage tenderly, as if anxious to make him well. Perhaps her own sufferings made her gentle with a brother in distress.

The two lived together happily for some weeks, until, at last, when the bird was well, he flew away and was never seen again. Possibly his longing for the tossing waves and the wild sea-shore was so great as to overcome even his friendship with Mrs. Puss.

THE RHEA



THE RHEA

I am not the fabulous Earth-mother
That you might think me from my name,
But only a strange large bird, who came
Out of an egg, like any other.

Despite a title so arresting,
I am as weak, while I am small,
As some of those that you would call
"Poor little things," if noticed nesting.

Alas, and there will be no flying
Even when we grow, for my queer breed ;
But we can run with marvellous speed,
And that's a gift there's no denying.

ON those broad, rolling, treeless plains that are known as the Pampas of South America, may be found as quaint a baby bird as could be imagined.

He is rather like a young goose, only he has such long, awkward-looking legs. His name, too, does not suit him very well, for he is called the "Rhea." The true meaning of this name is "The Mother of the Gods," but our quaint little bird is nothing more than a member of that long-legged, long-necked race of birds, known as the Ostrich family.

THE RHEA

In South Africa he has cousins who are noted for their beautiful, white tail plumes. Master Rhea will never have such plumes as these, no matter how big he grows. But he never does grow as big as the African Ostrich either. He may console himself, however, with the thought that he has feathers on his neck, and three toes, while all other Ostriches have bare necks and two toes.

And now comes the strangest part of this bird's history. He has never known what it is to have a fond mother to care for him. She just lays the egg and then walks off, as if she had nothing more to do with it. The young Rhea would be in a sad plight indeed if it were not that he had one of the best of fathers.

Mr. Rhea takes upon himself the whole business of hatching the eggs. Such large ones they are, too—cream coloured, with a thick shell, deeply pitted all over. He gathers the eggs together, raking them in with his wing, until he has about twenty or even more, in a shallow hole which he has scraped in the ground. These eggs, however, are all laid by different hens. The father sits on them until they are hatched, and then he trains the young ones to catch grasshoppers and other insects.

THE RHEA

There are some white Rheas, but the general colour is a greyish-buff, which is hard to distinguish among the dry, parched grasses of the Pampas.

Sometimes these poor creatures are hunted by dogs and men on horseback. If a breeze is blowing the Rhea will raise one wing, which acts as a sail, and then he goes along at such a speed that no dog or horse can catch up with him until he is tired. He never flies ; he can only run.

The Rhea is hunted for the sake of his plumage, and it is said that as many as four hundred thousand have been killed in one year. If nothing is done to stop this destruction it is supposed that, before very long, there will not be a single Rhea left in that country.

The cock-bird, when he is looking after a brood of young, is very warlike. Once an old Rhea had the courage to attack the engine of a train. He rushed up and kicked with all his might, but the train passed on, and there was a sudden end to the brave but quarrelsome father.

The young birds have a curious habit of "waltzing." Some dozen or more of them will run about a hundred yards, then stop, and raising their

THE RHEA

wings, spin round rapidly, often until they are quite giddy.

Two young Rheas were hatched in the Zoological Gardens, London some time ago. Although the father refused to care for them after they left the shell, they were lucky in finding a kind friend in a lady who took charge of them, and kept them warm in the breast of a woollen jersey that she wore. Their cry was a plaintive whistle, and they came readily when they were called.

Their kind protectress caught flies for their food, and they would eat as many as fifty at a time. When a fly was held out on the open palm of a hand they would come tearing along, looking something like two torpedoes, their necks outstretched in a line with their bodies, and they would snap the fly off the hand with the greatest skill.

Sad to say, this interesting pair did not live very long. Discovering that tender green grass was pleasant to the taste, they made a hearty meal of this delightful new food. The grass formed a hard ball inside each fluffy little body, and before long Master and Miss Rhea were cold and stiff and dead.

THE SKUA



THE SKUA

We are said to be hungry robber-birds,
Taking food from our neighbours with ruthless greed:
Whether these statements are baseless words,
Or whether the charge is true indeed,
We nestlings are far too young to know—
At least, to be sure if the slur is fair;
But when we are long-winged fliers, and go
Far seaward, we shall be well aware.

IN the Shetland Islands, far away to the north, the Skua has his home. He does not fly away to warm Southern countries when the summer is over, nor does he know anything about green hedgerows and pleasant woodlands. His home is among the tall bleak cliffs that face the strong sea winds, and he swoops and soars over the great waves fringed with foam.

He is a pirate, this strong and bold sea-bird. He is well called the "Highwayman of the Ocean," for he robs other birds of the prey that they catch for themselves. When some poor, innocent Gull has caught a fish, and is starting for home with the

THE SKUA

family meal, the Skua will chase him, demanding in dumb show : “Your fish or your life.” Then the Gull, thoroughly terrified, drops the herring, which the Skua cleverly catches in mid-air.

There is no reason why the Skua cannot fish for himself, but he will rarely take that trouble. He prefers to steal from other birds, and he will devour half-rotten fish thrown up by the sea, or he will swoop down on herrings that have been thrown overboard from fishing-craft.

Strangely enough he is a great favourite with fishermen in the Northern Seas. They do not mind his thievish ways, and think it a sign of good luck when he accompanies their boats. They give him a liberal share of the fish that they catch.

The Skua has another habit, even worse than that of taking other birds’ fish. He devours the eggs and young of the smaller Gulls who inhabit the rocky coasts. A writer on birds tells us—

“In Shetland I saw a Skua—or Bonxie, as it is called—tearing a young Herring Gull to pieces, while the frantic parents screamed above, but did not dare to come near the robber.”

He is a big bird, much larger than his wife.

THE SKUA

They both have dark blackish beaks, straight for two-thirds of their length and then hooked sharply. Their plumage is mottled brown, and some members of the family have the breast and underparts white. They are large birds, about the size of a Bantam, and the eggs correspond in size, having a rough shell olive-brown in colour, blotched with darker brown.

About the beginning of May the Skuas have paired and go to their haunts on the tops of cliffs or on the slopes of hills or mountains near the sea. They tread a hollow nearly a foot across, and this they line with moss, dead grass, and a few feathers. Two eggs are laid, never any more, and sometimes only one.

When hatched the young are pretty little creatures, two shades of chocolate brown in colour, darker above and lighter below, and as downy and fluffy as any chick could be. If one searches for them they are generally found sitting calmly amid herrings that the fond parents have brought and strewn all about them. Around one nest as many as eleven whole fish have been counted. The young birds are able to feed themselves, and to leave the nest, soon after being hatched. They will run away

THE SKUA

and try to hide in a most comical manner should any stranger draw near.

While they have babies at home the Skuas are most dangerous to meddle with. They will not hesitate to attack a fox or a dog with their sharp beaks, and will quickly send off these enemies. They will even dash at a man with much violence, when they see him anywhere near their nesting-places. They will knock off his hat with their feet, and he is generally obliged to hold a stick over his head to protect himself. It is said that a Skua will impale himself on a knife if it is held up in this manner.

When they are attacking they have the cry that gives them their name, "scoo—aah! scoo—aah!" To their young they say "guck—guck," and they call to one another, "ag—ag—ag."

A Skua was taken prisoner in Sussex, many years ago. He is said to have eaten no less than twenty-five sparrows in a day, and once when he escaped he attacked a harmless Duck, and held her by the beak until he was recaptured. This poor Skua only lived a fortnight in captivity, and indeed, for Sea-birds, death is a hundred times better than imprisonment. Even a tame Sea Gull is a sorry sight.

THE BLUE TIT



THE BLUE TIT

Of all the small creatures
That flutter and flit,
And receive, from their features,
The title of "Tit,"
We mites, who go dressed
In a bonnet of blue,
Are, I think, known the best,
And the best-beloved, too.

People say we are pert ;
Well, we chatter, no doubt ;
And they say we do hurt
When the fruit-buds come out.
But it's insects we eat—
(Most, at least)—on my word,
And this fact I repeat
As a truth-speaking bird.

THERE is one delightful family of little birds known as Tits. They might almost be given the name of Acrobats, so cleverly will they swing, head downwards, on a piece of string, pecking daintily at a walnut or a piece of suet, that has been hung on a tree for their enjoyment.

The Great Tit and the Blue Tit are the most constant visitors to our gardens during cold weather,

THE BLUE TIT

and appear most friendly to those kind people who take the trouble to provide small feasts for their feathered friends. The Great Tit is the largest of his family, although, even then, he is barely the size of a sparrow. He may be known by his olive-green back, and his breast of yellow, with a striking black line down the centre, a black head and throat and white cheeks.

The Blue Tit is much smaller, but he is similar in colouring, except that he has a blue crown and bluish wings and tail. He is one of the bravest, and also the most quarrelsome, of small birds, but he is a useful little fellow for destroying insects. Often when taking off insect-bitten buds he is doing a useful pruning, which will make the other buds larger and finer.

The nest is made of moss and lined with wool and hair and feathers. The mother chooses a convenient hollow, either in a wall or tree ; she has even been known to build in a flower-pot, an old coffee-pot, and many other odd places. The mother builds the nest and the father finds the materials. Should any one put an inquisitive hand into the hollow where Mrs. Tit is hidden, she will make a most

THE BLUE TIT

alarming, hissing noise, and peck at the intruding fingers. Because of this the Blue Tit is sometimes known as "Billy Biter." She lays wee whitish eggs, generally six or seven in number, but sometimes as many as eighteen are found.

A writer tells how once in cold weather he set a row of bird-traps in his garden. Seven times over he took a Tit out of one of the traps and placed him in an aviary. In the afternoon he went to the aviary to look at the birds he had caught, and he found no Tit there at all. He was greatly puzzled, but after thinking the matter over he made up his mind that he had been catching the same Tit over and over again, and that this bird had managed to escape each time. So he marked the tail of the next Tit he caught, and then put him in the aviary. In twenty minutes he saw another Tit in the trap, and, going to look, he found, as he had supposed, that it was the same one, caught for the ninth time : the Tit with the marked tail.

The clever bird had managed to escape by squeezing his body through the wire mesh at the top. He had put one wing through first, then his head, and then his body.

THE BLUE TIT

After this, since it had no terrors for him, the trap was propped open, and the happy Tit allowed to eat as much of the chopped suet and hemp-seed as he wanted.

Another story tells how a pair of Tits began to build in a post-box, in which, every day, letters were posted. Sad to say, the faithful little mother was killed by a cruel boy, and the nest remained unfinished until the next year, when the father Tit found another mate. The nest was finished and seven eggs laid. The mother sat on these for a while, but one day an unusually large number of postcards filled up the box and she deserted her nest.

The nest and eggs were taken away, but the next year the same pair built again, and this time they brought up their brood in safety, although letters posted were often found at the back of the sitting bird. The parents used to fly in and out of the slit through which letters were posted, and they did not seem disturbed when the door was opened for the box to be cleared.

THE YELLOW-HAMMER



THE YELLOW-HAMMER

When, towards the summer's close,
Lanes are dry,
And unclipt the hedgethorn rows,
There we fly !

While the harvest waggons pass
With their load,
Shedding corn upon the grass
By the road.

In a flock we follow them,
On and on,
Seize a wheat-ear by the stem,
And are gone. . . .

With our funny little song,
Thus you may
Often see us flit along,
Day by day.

THERE is one beautiful little bird, almost as well known as the Garden Thrush, or the Redbreast. He is to be found in every part of the country, and he is called the Yellow-Hammer, or Yellow Bunting. The name suits him well because his head, breast, and lower parts are of a bright yellow, almost the colour of dry mustard, streaked with dusky brown. His upper parts are reddish-brown.

THE YELLOW-HAMMER

He is not a shy bird, and during all seasons of the year he may be found in garden, farmyard, field and moor. One favourite haunt of his is a rough waste overgrown with prickly gorse or whin, and there his nest may often be seen. Sometimes it is built on the ground, and once an unfortunate mother-bird made her nest in a rut, where she, sitting on her eggs, was crushed to death by the wheel of a waggon.

More often it is placed among briars and brambles some distance from the ground; at other times in a thick hedge, and occasionally in a fir-tree at the edge of a plantation. It is made of moss, small roots, and sticks, and lined with dried grasses and horsehair.

Even though her nest be destroyed, the Yellow-Hammer will continue to build in the same spot time after time. One Yellow-Hammer was noticed to have established herself on the edge of a gravel path, and there she laid and hatched four eggs. Owing to the dangerous spot she had chosen, three of her nestlings were killed, and then a kind friend moved the nest to a sheltered nook some distance away. The faithful little mother followed, and safely brought up her fourth and only remaining child.

THE YELLOW-HAMMER

The middle of March is the pairing time of the Yellow-Hammer, and the eggs are laid early in April. They are generally of a stone colour, streaked and scribbled over with lines of purplish-brown or grey. Because of these curious marks the bird is sometimes known as the Writing Lark.

The male bird is a devoted father, and he helps his mate to hatch the eggs. When she is on the nest he is nearly always to be found on a spray close by, chirping a little song. Two broods are reared in a year, and usually three nestlings in each, but sometimes four or five. The young are not able to fly until about a fortnight after they have been hatched. When first fledged they are of a dull yellowish-brown, streaked with black. They do not show their golden crowns until after the first autumn moult.

The song of the Yellow-Hammer, although cheerful, is not exactly beautiful. Country-people say that he is repeating the words—

“A little bit of bread and no che—e—ese !”

He is to be heard singing early in February, and he continues right through July and August, when most other birds are silent. He feeds on insects and flies, but mostly on the seeds of troublesome

THE YELLOW-HAMMER

weeds. He is also fond of grain, and may be seen pulling ears out of stacks, winnowing them, and having a rare feast.

Once one of these birds was placed in a cage with a young Cuckoo, and the industrious little creature was seen to be feeding his greedy companion with unceasing care and kindness.

A bird-lover tells how he was walking one day down a country lane, when he saw on the bank under the hedge a pair of Yellow-Hammers with their newly fledged young. Startled by his approach, one of these baby birds fluttered down into the road, and sat there, chirping in a helpless kind of way. The poor mother was in a sad state of distress, and she flew down beside her young one, doing all she could to draw away the attention of the dangerous-looking stranger. At last the mate, fearing to lose his dear wife as well as his child, followed too, and tried to draw her away by pulling her tail and hopping backwards.

This went on for about a minute, when the onlooker, not wishing to alarm the poor birds any longer, walked away quickly, leaving the three to regain a place of safety.

CHICKENS



CHICKENS

Our mother lives in a wooden hutch :
We wonder she should stay there
When we enjoy the mead so much
By running out to play there.

Perhaps she cannot join our game
Because the bars won't let her ;
So we play on, and (to our shame)
Until she clucks, forget her.

THE Mother Hen with her brood of downy Chicks is a pleasant sight. How anxiously she guards them, and how tenderly she will gather them under her wings at the least sign of danger !

Could one of her family be able to tell us his history, he would most likely begin by recalling the days when he was a close prisoner in a tiny shell. Before long, however, he gets a wider view of the world, for as soon as he is strong enough he promptly chips his way out. This is no easy task, and he seems exhausted for several hours after, while his down is quite wet. His mother, however, shelters him, and all his brothers and sisters, under her soft,

CHICKENS

warm feathers. For the first day of his life after he has left the shell, he is rather weak, and not at all hungry, but after that he is able to run about at a great rate.

He is a charming little fellow then, so soft and fluffy, generally yellow, or buff, or whitish in colour. It is weeks before he has any real feathers. Then they start to sprout from his shoulders and elbows, and these feathers grow quite a lot before he has any tail to speak of.

The Mother Hen finds for her babies flies, grubs and tiny worms, but she also teaches them, odd though it seems, to eat stone. They have to pick up and swallow every little sharp chip she can find, for she knows that Chickens have, inside them, organs that are like small mills, and these must be supplied with tiny grinding stones. She teaches them, also, where to look for food. She scratches in moss and leaves, or in the straw, or round the roots of grass, and she calls "Cluck ! cluck !" and the tiny ones run with haste to see what she has found.

They are fed, too, by whoever owns them, with ground oats, soft boiled wheat, and other good nourishing food.

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Until they are three weeks or a month old, the Chicks need the warmth of their mother's breast and wings, but at the end of that time their wing feathers are grown, and they are able to keep warm without her help.

As they grow older, Chickens seem to get uglier and uglier. Their legs look too long, and their bodies are covered with sprouting stubs and ugly quills instead of pretty soft down. Sad to say, when the young Cockerels are big enough they are often most quarrelsome, and sad fights take place between them.

Here is a true story of two young Cocks who lived in a farmyard. The elder was called Jupiter. He had been given this name because he was so stately and dignified. He had pure white plumage and considered himself quite the king of all the poultry. The other Cock was some weeks younger. He was parti-coloured, and not particularly beautiful. He was called "Secundus," which means "second."

Poor Secundus was treated very badly by Jupiter. He was pushed on one side and driven away from food, but he bore all with great patience, and seemed to dwell apart from the other fowls.

CHICKENS

Secundus never crowed, while Jupiter loved to mount on a hurdle and crow loudly, as if he were calling attention to his beauty and strength. Meanwhile Secundus was growing stronger and stronger every day.

The autumn came. In the field where the poultry lived there was a fir-tree, in which they loved to roost. One evening, being full of pride, Jupiter suddenly made up his mind that he would not allow Secundus to go into that tree at all. Nobody saw exactly what happened then, but, less than an hour after, Jupiter was found lying under the tree, utterly defeated, covered with mud, and with no more spirit in him. Above in the tree sat Secundus, king in Jupiter's place.

In a day or two the white Cock recovered his beauty of plumage, but not his pride. He lived apart, sadly, as Secundus had once done. He was never again heard to crow, but his victorious rival was often heard loudly proclaiming that he was indeed lord and master.

THE DUCKLING



THE DUCKLING

What young bird is braver
Than a little Duck,
Plunging into water
While, quite terror-struck,
Stands the Hen that hatched me,
Calling, Cluck—cluck—cluck !

Why I hate a dry life,
And so love a damp,
Why I start a-swimming—
Fear no cold or cramp—
She is wondering wildly
On her brookside tramp.

ABOUT April, earlier or later according to the weather, one may be lucky enough to find a Wild Duck's nest.

Perhaps it may be stumbled upon, unawares, among some reeds by the river-side. Whirr—whirr—whirr ! There will be the sound of wings, and a loud quack, as Mrs. Duck flies out, much frightened, leaving about eleven greenish-white eggs, snug and warm, in a large, deep nest of twigs and grass.

THE DUCKLING

The common Wild Duck, sometimes called the Mallard, although this name rightly belongs only to the male, is almost exactly like the Tame Duck of the poultry yard. The Tame Duck has shorter wings and a heavier body, but the same plumage.

The Drake has a yellowish bill, glossy green head and neck, and a white collar. His upper parts are greyish-white, marked with zigzag lines of ash-brown and grey, and his breast is a deep chestnut. Mrs. Duck is smaller in body, has a crown of dark brown, and plumage of mottled brown and buff. Her tail feathers are straight while those of the Drake, or Mallard, curl upwards.

The Wild Duck pairs very early in the year, and has found a nesting-place by the middle of March. Generally the spot chosen is near a river or a lake, but very often it is far away from water. Sometimes Mrs. Duck builds under a furze bush, sometimes under a thick hedgerow, or even in some safe hole in a tree. She lays from nine to eleven eggs. When she is sitting she pulls from her own breast the soft down which grows beneath the feathers, and packs this warmly round the eggs. Then, when she leaves the nest, she pulls this down, like a soft coverlid, over

THE DUCKLING

the eggs. Mrs. Duck rarely leaves her nest more than once or twice in the day. Before she does so, her mate takes several flights to see that there is no lurking danger. As the days pass and her brood is nearly hatched, the faithful mother will not stir from the nest. When twenty days are over, the eggs chip, and the tiny Ducklings appear. They are fluffy little creatures, something like chickens, but their bills are longer and broader, and their feet are webbed. Often a sitting of Duck's eggs has been placed under a Hen, and then she has a terrible fright when her brood takes to the water. On the other hand, a Duck hatched a Hen's egg which had been placed among her own, and when she found that the little creature would not take to the water like the Ducklings, she pushed him in and he was drowned.

When Mrs. Duck builds in a tree she is supposed to carry her young ones down to the ground by her beak. An Eider Duck, whose home is always near the sea, was noticed one day to be leading her brood to a cliff which stood between her and the water. As there was quite fifteen feet of sheer rock, the onlooker ran quickly to see how the Ducklings would manage. They walked to the edge and then

THE DUCKLING

hung back, as if afraid, but the mother gave them, one by one, a good push with her bill, right over the cliff, and then flew down after them.

By the time the one who was watching reached the edge of the cliff and looked over, the mother was swimming out to sea with her young ones behind her, none of them any the worse for the tumble.

The Ducklings do not fly until they are nine or ten weeks old. They scutter along the surface of the water at a great rate, using their feet and wings. They are really dirty little dabblers, and the blacker the mud the more they seem to like it. They fill their bills with ooze, but they do not eat it ; they only strain it for the worms and insects it contains.

When harvest comes they make their way, if they can, to a cornfield, and feast on the fallen grain.

The Wild Duck or Mallard pairs for life, and has only one wife, but the farmyard Drake has any number.

THE JAY



THE JAY

Like so many beauties, we
Feel the darts of enmity;
Every sporting squire detests us,
Every gamekeeper molests us :
Hence our hope is far from strong
For a life secure and long.

What is strange, we do not know
Why they should oppress us so,
Even while they lightly own
Birds more bright have never flown.—
Soon you will not see a Jay,
So our elder kindred say.

POOR Mrs. Jay! No matter how carefully she builds her nest, no matter how well she tends her young, in fact no matter what she does, she seems always to have a bad name.

The gamekeeper calls her a “pest,” and shoots her whenever he can. Sometimes in the woodland, when sunbeams and shadows are dancing beneath the boughs, and a million tiny voices are whispering of life and joy, one may come upon a sad sight—the dead bodies of several Jays, nailed to a tree. They are put there as a warning to other birds, or

THE JAY

to show, perhaps, that the gamekeeper has been taking care of the game.

One would like to be able to say that the Jays never, never touch game, but it must be owned that they do help themselves, sometimes, to the eggs of the Pheasant and the Partridge, and even devour the young birds. These stolen dainties, however, form but a small part of the Jay's fare. He lives mostly on acorns, for which he may be seen searching in winter under the snow. He also eats beech-mast, nuts and berries, corn, worms, cockchafers and other insects, larvæ, frogs and mice. Altogether he does far more good than harm.

It is said that if the Jays are destroyed so mercilessly there will soon be not one left. This would be a great pity, for there is no more handsome bird. Both male and female are alike in their colouring, having pinkish-grey plumage, the crest greyish-white streaked with black, a heavy black mark under the eyes, and the wings and tail barred with black, white, and blue. The young, when fledged, are of the same colour as their parents though somewhat less bright.

The nest of the Jay is rarely seen near the tops

THE JAY

of trees like those of the Crow and Magpie. To find it one must search sometimes in a thick bush, or in the lower branches of an oak. It is cup-shaped and open, built of twigs and sticks, sometimes plastered together with mud, while fine roots and dried grass make a soft lining. The eggs are rather smaller than those of the Magpie, and are five or six in number, of a greenish or yellowish white colour, and freckled over with light brown.

The mother, though a very timid bird as a rule, sits so closely that one often has to shake the tree before she will leave. If one watches the Jay to her nest containing young, she will sometimes be seen to descend to the ground and search round carefully. Then, if she discovers anything alarming, she will fly off with a harsh squawk.

The gape of the young bird is enormous. Surely there never was a more hungry mouth to fill ! One cannot look at the Baby Jay without hearing him utter his peculiar, hungry cry.

The mother feeds her young by thrusting her beak into their throats and giving them food that she has already swallowed and brought back.

When the Baby Jays leave the nest they stay

THE JAY

with their mother for several weeks. They are taught, no doubt, all sorts of clever and cunning ways of finding food for themselves. The eggs of the Thrush are much enjoyed by the young Jays.

One may be sure, too, that their mother teaches them to be wary, and to keep a quick eye for strangers. She teaches them to cry "Kak! Kak!" whenever an enemy appears, be it man or hawk or stoat. Because of this cry, which sounds like the tearing of linen, the Jay acts as a sort of watch dog, and warns all wild creatures in the woods.

The little ones have no sweet song to learn, although, when thinking of building the nest, the father and mother make soft pleasant noises.

The Jay is easily tamed, and learns to say many words. He seems to be fond of having a practical joke at times, for it is his habit to hide himself under leaves where small birds are gathered together, and then, when they are enjoying themselves in their own simple way, he will suddenly give them a terrible fright by screaming out like a Hawk. The poor little birds will scatter themselves in a moment, and then the mischievous Jay gives a cackle that sounds exactly like a rude laugh.

THE GANNET



THE GANNET

A grey isle, sombre and forlorn,
Washed by the white-fringed sea,
Contains the nook where we were born,
And live in jeopardy.

For, to our rock, by ways unguessed,
Rough men come every day,
And let down ropes, to reach our nest,
And carry us away.

WHEN Mrs. Gannet is sitting on her nest, waiting for her eggs to be hatched, she has a splendid view over the wide tossing ocean. For she is a sea-bird, and loves to wing her way over the foamy billows, and her nest is perched high on a rocky ledge of some steep cliff, where a man could hardly find a foothold.

The Gannet is one of the largest sea-birds to be found on the coasts of Great Britain. During the spring and autumn many tens of thousands gather together in certain places, such as Lundy Isle, and many of the islands round Scotland, especially the famous rock known as the Bass Rock.

THE GANNET

The Gannet is about the size of a goose, and has a head and neck tinged with a light buff-colour. All the rest of the plumage is white, except the tips of the wings, which are black.

When the Gannet first comes from the shell he is a remarkably ugly young person, having a bare, inky-black skin, and being quite blind. He soon improves in appearance, and before many days he is covered with fluffy white down, which makes him look like a powder puff. Afterwards he has brown feathers, tipped with white, which give him a spotted appearance, and this coat lasts until the fourth year, when he has the dazzling plumage of the adult.

The Mother Gannet never lays more than one egg at a sitting. This is of a bluish colour, but is covered with a chalky-white substance which can be washed off. She feeds the young one with a milky fluid from her beak.

Both the father and the mother take turns in sitting upon the egg, which is hatched after six weeks. The nest is merely a rough pile of seaweed, and it is generally built on the narrow ledges of a rock, where hundreds of other Gannets have their abode also. It is a very amusing sight to see Mrs.

THE GANNET

Gannet building her nest. Her dutiful husband brings her as much seaweed as he can find, and sometimes he may be seen flying in with a tremendously long piece held in his beak and trailing behind. If another pair should be unwise enough to leave their nest unguarded, a Gannet in need will have no hesitation in stealing some of their best material to furbish up his own nest. Should he be found out, the rightful owner will do his best to punish this barefaced theft.

These birds fight in a curious manner. They sit facing each other, and one holds the other by the beak, and pulls with all his might. Once a certain Gannet found that a stranger had taken possession of his nest. He was not going to allow this, of course, and so he seized the beak of the intruder, but, tug as hard as he could, he was not able to pull him off. Mrs. Gannet happened to come up at this moment, and she naturally took the part of her husband, and, laying hold of the tail of the bird on the nest, began to pull in the opposite direction. What would have happened if they had continued to pull long enough can only be guessed, for the intruder soon had enough of the tug-of-war, and flew off in great indignation.

THE GANNET

The Gannets live on such fish as herrings, sprats and pilchards, all of which swim near the surface of the sea.

A cruel method of killing Gannets is practised in some parts. A herring is fastened to a board, which is then sunk a few feet in the sea. The Gannet's sharp eye sees the fish, but he does not notice the board. He raises himself to a height above it, and then pounces down. He either strikes the board with such force as to be killed, or his beak becomes fixed in the wood, and he is drowned.

THE REDSHANK



THE REDSHANK

Our legs are so red,
And such mere skin and bone,
That it might well be said
They are cold as a stone,
Since it's clear not a shred
Of a stocking we own !

Though our tails are quite short,
Our wing feathers are strong,
So that when we all start—
An adventurous throng—
For the North, in good heart
We go flying along !

It may be that when Mrs. Redshank is guarding her young in the nest she tells them interesting tales about the life they will lead when they are grown up, and how, when the summer is over, they will go southward, and live by the seashore, where they will be able to wade to their hearts' content over sand and mud. They are well able to do this, because of the long, thin, red legs, from which they take their name.

“Oh, Mother,” one might imagine the young

THE REDSHANK

ones saying, "what a glorious time that will be, and how we shall enjoy it!"

And then, very likely, she will tell them how they will be able to thrust their slender beaks into the oozy mud, where they will find worms, and the most delicious marine insects, all with the fine salt flavour of the sea upon them.

The Baby Redshank is a most engaging little creature, very quaint and pretty, yet with an air of knowing all that it is possible for a young bird to know. He is covered with soft creamy down, faintly touched with dark brown; and one curious point about him is that his toes are unusually long and spreading for so small a bird. Just the right sort of toes for paddling and walking over marshy places.

It is not until the beginning of May that Mrs. Redshank lays her four eggs. These have a greenish tinge, and blotches and marks of dull reddish brown. The nest is often nothing more than a small hollow trodden in the ground, lined with a few dried bents, or grasses, or a dead leaf or two, and often with no lining at all. Sometimes it is placed in the middle of a tussock of grass, which is pulled over it so as to hide it from view.

THE REDSHANK

If any stranger should go near the nest during the breeding season, the Mother Redshank will be much excited, and will fly in circles, round and round the intruder's head, often swooping down suddenly, as if wishing to frighten him away. Should there be young ones in the nest, or on the point of being hatched, the mother will play a trick, quite common among birds of this order. She will drop to the ground, and flutter along, as if she were wounded. By doing this she thinks to draw to herself the attention of the stranger, and to lead him away from the nest.

The Redshank is a friendly bird and loves to build in the same spot as her fellows. Numbers of their nests may be found together in one small plot of ground. At the time when these birds are pairing, Mr. Redshank behaves in a comical manner, and goes through many queer antics to please and amuse his mate. He may be seen on the tops of fence-posts or on stone walls, bowing and strutting and spreading his tail. Then again, in the evening, when his mate is sitting, he will fly round her, trilling a loving song.

The Redshank seems to prefer damp spots, and her nest is generally to be found near water.

THE REDSHANK

In the summer this bird has upper feathers of ash-brown, with a broad dusky streak in the centre, and the under-plumage is white, spotted and streaked with tawny-brown. In the winter the tints fade, and become a paler ash-colour, and the spots and markings are not nearly so distinct.

When the Redshank sees men with guns going out to shoot waterfowl, he gives the alarm by a long screaming cry, and off fly all the birds.

Almost as soon as the young are hatched they leave the nest, so that the mother has really very little trouble with them. Nevertheless she is fond and devoted, and guards them well, while the Father Redshank, for his part, thinks that his duties as a parent are finished as soon as the young ones chip the shell, and from that time he pays them next to no attention.

The cry of the Redshank sounds as if he were calling "liddle, liddle, liddle."

When caught he is easily tamed and will soon become fond of the one who feeds him. In captivity he eats quantities of raw meat, chopped fine, and worms also, and grain.

THE CAPERCAILZIE



THE CAPERCAILZIE

In the depth of the pine-wood
All weathers live we,
Making meals of the green buds
That sprout from each tree.
And so dark are the shadows
The pine-branches wear,
That few passers notice
Our residence there.

But the folk who would spy us
Come prowling around,
Taking pains to descry us
In nests on the ground.
Oh, it's bad for our chances
Of life on that day,
If we shun not the glances
Of men such as they!

HARDLY any bird has greater cause to be proud of his father than has the young Capercaillie.

Perhaps he hopes that he, too, may some day grow into just such another, and deserve the name of the finest game-bird in Great Britain. His sisters, however, must be content to be a smaller bird, with a plainish coat of feathers, while he looks forward to growing to quite a tremendous size, weighing from ten to fifteen pounds, and having a shining blackish coat, and a breast of lustrous green. Over his eyes

THE CAPERCAILZIE

there will be a crescent-shaped patch of bright scarlet, and under it a smaller mark of white feathers.

When the baby Capercaillie first creeps out of the egg, he, most likely, finds himself in a little hollow in the ground, among the heather or the wire-like stems of the bilberries, and generally not very far from water. That is not much of a nest, certainly, but the mother does her best to make it snug by lining it with scraps of dried grass and dead leaves.

Around him he will see the dark feathery boughs of pine and fir-trees and larches, for it is in the forests of Scotland that this bird is found, and in other Northern countries.

In his nest the Capercaillie has from eight to twelve brothers and sisters, all of whom have made their way out of brownish-buff eggs, spotted with reddish brown. The mother is very devoted, but the handsome father pays next to no attention to his babies. As a matter of fact, the father Capercaillie has so many wives and families that he could not possibly look after all his children.

The mother, who is in appearance something like the hen pheasant, does not lack courage, and she will defend her young from all danger. If surprised

THE CAPERCAILZIE

with them in the open she will gather her brood under her wings, make a hissing noise, and puff herself out, boldly facing the intruder.

The young are covered with a buffish yellow down, mottled with chestnut brown. They do not like the heat of the sun, and in summer they may be found sheltering themselves under over-hanging banks, trying to escape from it. Their mother feeds them with ants and ant-eggs, worms and small beetles, and they catch small flies for themselves. They are able to run about soon after leaving the nest, but they keep with their mother until the following winter.

When the Capercailzie has grown out of babyhood he feeds largely on the needles and young buds of the pine and the fir-trees. It is said that he does much damage, but it is likely that he is often blamed for mischief done by the squirrel.

Very curious is his "spel" or love-song, which he sings to his mates in the spring. This takes place in the early morning, or after sunset.

The cock bird mounts upon the branch of some tree in an open part of the forest. His wings droop, his tail spreads out like a fan, the long feathers on

THE CAPERCAILZIE

his neck ruffle and his head is stretched out. Then, for three or four minutes, he sings, uttering a sound like "peller, peller, peller," and he gradually works himself into such a wild state of excitement that he does not notice any danger drawing near.

On the ground beneath the tree the hens will stand, filled with admiration at this wonderful performance. They can only cluck "gock, gock," in a harsh way, but they do this with all their might to attract his attention.

When Capercaillie and Pheasants live in the same wood it is said that the Capercaillie do harm by driving away the Pheasants from the coops and eating the Indian corn put there for them. It is said, too, that a Capercaillie will often take possession of a Pheasant's nest even if there be eggs in it.

It was once noticed that a hen Capercaillie had come upon a Pheasant's nest containing four eggs, which the mother had carefully covered with leaves before going away to find food. The Capercaillie took her place there and laid more eggs. Fortunately the birds seemed to come to a friendly understanding, and they took turn and turn about in sitting on the eggs until a brood of birds of both kinds was hatched.

THE TROPIC BIRD



THE TROPIC BIRD

Far on the azure plain
Of the swelling, swaying main,
Where looms for many a mile
But a little palmy isle,
We delight in seeing a ship,
And follow with skim and skip
In its furrowed, frothy wake,
Watching with anxious ache
For what sailors can afford
To throw us overboard.

Where rocks are loftiest
We are hatched, with never a nest,
In some hollow of the stone ;
And, as tides in turning moan
Just beneath us hour by hour,
We sit longing for the power
To o'ersweep them like our sires,
Whom far-flying never tires.

THE name of Tropic Bird sounds as if it should belong to some glowing feathered being with jewel-like breast and plummy tail of many changing hues ; one, perhaps, that might be seen in deep forests, flitting from one gorgeous flower to another, among a hundred delicate odours.

There are, indeed, many radiant birds of this sort in the tropics, but the one who really owns the name belongs to a race of sea-birds, and follows in

THE TROPIC BIRD

the wake of ships that sail in the South Atlantic, the South Pacific, and the Indian Ocean. His story, if he could tell it, would be of coral islands, crowned with feathery palms, of clear crystalline waves, each lovely as a jewel, of flying fish like little silver arrows, that leave the sea, flash through the air and vanish.

Certainly the Tropic Bird is one of the most beautiful of sea-birds. The baby bird is an odd enough little creature, quite round, and covered with white fluffy down, but with tiny black markings on his wee wings. His beak is strong and long for such a little body, and his eyes are bright and intelligent.

Some of the young ones are beautifully marked, barred above with black arrow-headed markings. These, when they grow up, have crimson beaks and long crimson tail-feathers.

The Tropic Bird builds no nest, but lays a single egg, generally in the crevice of some cliff. The Yellow-billed Tropic Bird now and then lays her egg in the hollow of some tree, but she is the only one of her family who ever deserts the cliff dwellings.

The little flying fish that are so common in warm seas are the favourite food of the Tropic Bird, and with these she feeds her young.

THE TROPIC BIRD

In appearance the Tropic Bird is something like a Gull, or one of the larger Terns. He has a strong pointed bill, nearly arched, and his head is well covered with feathers. The four toes are joined by a web, and his flight is more like that of a Duck than a Gull, since he gives constant and rapid strokes of the wing. Nevertheless he is able to soar without resting for longer than almost any other sea-bird, and it is said that he can pass whole days in the air without needing to settle.

He is a great favourite with sailors, who give to him the name of "Boatswain," on account of his long shrill whistle. He seems particularly fond of hovering about ships, and now and then will settle at the mast-head. Hardly ever is he to be seen on the water.

Tropic Birds can easily be divided into three groups or families, according to their colouring and size.

First and best known is the Common Tropic Bird. His plumage is of a satiny white, with curved black lines on the back, while a few of his feathers are black, tipped with white. He is to be found in all the oceans within the tropics, and he is about the

THE TROPIC BIRD

size of a Partridge, but his long tail-feathers make him appear larger.

Another kind is known as the Yellow-billed Tropic Bird, and he may be found chiefly in the seas around the Island of Bermuda. His feathers are of a beautiful apricot colour.

But perhaps the most attractive of all is the Roseate, or Red-tailed Tropic Bird. He is larger in size than the others and his plumage has a rosy tinge. His long red tail-feathers are used in the South Pacific Islands by the natives to make war head-dresses, and they are also woven into baskets and sold by the inhabitants of the Sandwich Islands. It is said that the natives obtain these feathers by creeping up to the bird's nest while she is sitting, and quietly plucking out the coveted plumes.

Tropic Birds have often been noticed resting at their ease on the back of some huge turtle who is taking his noonday nap on the surface of the water.

